



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Kevin Murphy

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Third Session

FRIDAY, MARCH 26, 2021

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House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, FRIDAY, MARCH 26, 2021

Sixty-third General Assembly

Third Session

9:00 A.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Kevin Murphy

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

Keith Bain, Susan Leblanc

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Just before I get into the daily routine, I want to deliver a Speaker's Ruling on the point of order raised yesterday by the Opposition Party.

SPEAKER'S RULING

Yesterday, I took under advisement a point of order by the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, who stated that the honourable Minister of Health and Wellness tried to intimidate members from asking questions by misrepresenting their intentions. Intimidating members from asking questions would not only be unparliamentary, it could amount to a breach of members' privilege.

Bosc and Gagnon, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice, Third Edition*, states at Page 107-108: "Any form of intimidation of a Member with respect to a Member's actions during a proceeding in Parliament could amount to contempt."

However, intimidation occurs when one frightens or threatens another, usually to compel the other to do something or to deter the other from doing something. Misrepresenting a person's intentions is not an act of intimidation, although doing so is itself an unparliamentary act. As Speaker Gosse ruled in this House on April 4, 2013: "It is unparliamentary and contrary to convention and usage for any member to impute to another member bad motives or motives different from those acknowledged by that other member with respect to anything said or done by that other member."

Accordingly, I have treated the point of order as alleging two distinct unparliamentary acts - intimidating the members asking questions and misrepresenting the members' intention in asking the questions - and I have reviewed the minister's reply to determine if either of these acts occurred.

In response to a question by the honourable member for Cole Harbour-Eastern Passage, the Minister of Health and Wellness stated:

"I want to thank the public servants who, during this difficult last year, put in an incredible number of hours and helped protect Nova Scotians, particularly those on our long-term care team who made sure that we were prepared for a Wave 2 and kept COVID-19 out of long-term care facilities.

This is the second time that that member has used the personal name of somebody in the department - someone who works very hard and who's very committed - and I think it's very shameful when the Party opposite attacks our public servants who've been putting in the hard work and doing the heavy lifting to protect Nova Scotians and implement key plans during the COVID-19 pandemic. Particularly considering that that Party hid under a rock for the last year while other people did all the work for them.

I would hope that that member at some point will apologize to the public servants she has attacked in this way."

There is nothing in the minister's response to that that can be construed as intimidating or threatening. The statement that the member for Cole Harbour-Eastern Passage's Party "hid under a rock" was unparliamentary, and the minister retracted his unparliamentary comment after the Leader of the Official Opposition rose on the point of order following Question Period.

Other than that comment, which has already been addressed, there is nothing in the minister's reply that can be reasonably taken as an attempt to threaten members of the Opposition or making them fearful of asking questions.

As for misrepresenting the member for Cole Harbour-Eastern Passage's intention, the minister's reply does not characterize her intentions at all. It only characterizes her question as an attack on a public servant. Whether the minister's characterization is accurate or not amounts to a disagreement of facts between the minister and the Leader of the Official Opposition.

In response to a question by the honourable member for Dartmouth East, the Minister of Health and Wellness stated:

“Again, I'm not sure why the Party opposite targets our public servants in this way. They are not publicly elected officials. They serve the elected wing of government, and they serve us and Nova Scotians very well. That has been demonstrated every single day during this pandemic over the last year in particular.

I would encourage the members opposite to please stop this line of attack on our public servants because they are the backbone of what our response has been over the last year. I personally want to thank them for their great work, and I want them to know that they have the confidence of the government and, I believe, of the public.”

Again, there is nothing in the minister's reply that can reasonably be taken as an attempt to threaten members of the Opposition or make them fearful of asking questions. The minister asked that the members opposite not engage in a particular line of questioning. Those members are free to ignore that request and continue to ask their questions. Nothing in the minister's reply suggests any deleterious consequences for doing so.

The minister did not impute any intentions to the member for Dartmouth East. The minister explicitly disclaimed any knowledge of the member's intent in asking the question. As with the minister's other impugned reply, all that exists here is a disagreement of fact between the minister and Leader of the Official Opposition regarding the accuracy of the minister's characterization of the question as being an attack on a public servant.

Accordingly, there are no points of order.

We'll now move on to the daily routine.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton-Richmond.

ALANA PAON: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to present a petition. The operative clause reads as follows:

“We, the undersigned, would like to petition government regarding the deplorable state of the St. Peter’s Fourchu Road, which runs from Lower L’Ardoise to Fourchu, a 50 km section of the Fleur de Lis Trail which is listed in the Nova Scotia Doers and Dreamers Travel Guide 2020. Initially paved in 1994, the road is now in severely poor condition risking motorist safety and resulting in repeated vehicular damage to residents and visitors alike. We ask the Nova Scotia Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal and the Minister of Business, responsible for Tourism Nova Scotia, to recognize the economic importance and tourism impact of the Fleur de Lis Trail; acknowledge the above mentioned road’s current deplorable condition and commit to prioritizing the repaving of it as well as improved maintenance to it and its connecting roadways. We are asking for an IMMEDIATE 5-year plan to repave this stretch of highway, starting with the most urgent sections of the roadway, to a standard that can accommodate the heavy weight traffic it sustains.”

Mr. Speaker, I’m very proud to say there are 1,162 residents who have affixed their signature to the petition. I have affixed my name, making 1,163. I ask that the Speaker take the petition into consideration. I would like to table the petition on behalf of the residents.

THE SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

THE SPEAKER: As Speaker of the House of Assembly and Chair of the Assembly Management Commission, I’m pleased to table the House of Assembly Management Commission Annual Report for the calendar year 2020. The report was prepared pursuant to Section 11(1)(f) of the House of Assembly Management Commission Act.

The report is tabled.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Communities, Culture and Heritage.

RESOLUTION NO. 275

HON. SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: Mr. Speaker, I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas the most famous ship in Canadian history, *Bluenose*, connects us all to the sea, with skill, hard work, and teamwork needed to sail through any storm; and

Whereas the proud spirit of Captain Angus Walters and his crew 100 years ago still echoes in the hearts and minds of many young Canadians, who join *Bluenose II*'s crew each Spring; and

Whereas this centennial, we celebrate 100 years of *Bluenose*'s reign;

Therefore be it resolved that this House recognize and celebrate the *Bluenose* centennial, and wish her fair winds for another successful season.

Mr. Speaker, I request waiver of notice and passage without debate.

[9:15 a.m.]

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Communities, Culture and Heritage.

RESOLUTION NO. 276

HON. SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: Mr. Speaker, I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas during COVID-19, Nova Scotians have demonstrated resilience and creativity, including those responsible for *Bluenose II* and her crew; and

Whereas this past Summer, we saw *Bluenose II* sail past multiple coastal communities in our province; and

Whereas the diligent efforts of those responsible for *Bluenose II* Sail Past Summer enabled the people of this province to view *Bluenose II*, some for the very first time;

Therefore be it resolved that this House recognize *Bluenose II* and all that made Sail Past Summer possible, offering a symbol of hope during one of the toughest years this province has ever faced.

Mr. Speaker, I request waiver of notice and passage without debate.

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

RESOLUTION NO. 277

HON. KEITH COLWELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas all 31 crew members of the 142-ft. *Atlantic Destiny* were recently rescued when the vessel was fishing on Georges Bank, 170 nautical miles from Yarmouth, on the night of March 2nd; and

Whereas a fire broke out on the scallop fishing vessel, which subsequently lost power, faced two-story waves and powerful winds, and began taking on water; and

Whereas CFB Greenwood 413 Transport and Rescue Squadron responded with their crews, the Canadian Coast Guard ship *Cape Roger* travelled overnight for 11 hours, and the U.S. Coast Guard base in Cape Cod responded with helicopters and several offshore fishing vessels, including the *Cape LaHave*, *Maude Adams*, *Atlantic Preserver*, and *Atlantic Protector*, responded to the *Atlantic Destiny*;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House recognize and express our sincere gratitude for the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre in Halifax and all the parties who came to assist the *Atlantic Destiny* and her crew.

Mr. Speaker, I ask for waiver of notice and passage without debate.

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Agriculture.

RESOLUTION NO. 278

HON. KEITH COLWELL: Mr. Speaker, I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas Wild Blueberry Solutions Challenge is a competition among Nova Scotia companies to develop innovative, value-added products and packaging solutions; and

Whereas the challenge is a joint initiative between the Department of Agriculture and the Wild Blueberry Producers Association of Nova Scotia; and

Whereas Clever Fruit Products in Mahone Bay, Lunenburg County, was announced the winner in 2020 at the Wild Blueberry Solutions Challenge for their cholesterol-reducing, fermented wild blueberry powder, and was awarded \$126,000 to help grow sales, pursue new export markets, and develop new products;

Therefore be it resolved that members of this House of Assembly recognize that by supporting this challenge, we are helping our innovative companies develop new products that will bring greater income from their berries.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask for waiver of notice and passage without debate.

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

RESOLUTION NO. 279

HON. KEITH IRVING: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas every year at 8:30 p.m. on the last Saturday of March, millions of people across the world join together for Earth Hour to raise awareness of the issues facing our planet; and

Whereas Earth Hour is now one of the world's largest grassroots movements for the environment, and no matter where you are in the world, you can make an impact by participating; and

Whereas Nova Scotians believe in protecting our natural environment and reducing our energy consumption;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House recognize Earth Hour and take part in the movement by switching off your lights and electronics for one hour this Saturday at 8:30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I request waiver of notice and passage without debate.

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Acadian Affairs and Francophonie.

RESOLUTION NO. 280

HON. LENA METLEGE DIAB: Mr. Speaker, I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas post-secondary students with permanent disabilities have experienced financial and accessibility barriers from the impacts of COVID-19; and

Whereas approximately 3,000 post-secondary students with permanent disabilities in Nova Scotia will receive a one-time grant to help cover unexpected costs with their studies during the pandemic; and

Whereas this grant will provide extra funding support and help these students address new barriers arising from remote learning and other learning environment changes;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this Legislature join me in wishing these students the very best in all their future endeavours. All our post-secondary students deserve to have the equity of access to quality post-secondary education and training.

I request waiver of notice and passage without debate.

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Justice.

RESOLUTION NO. 281

HON. RANDY DELOREY: Mr. Speaker, I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas the role of Assistant Chief Electoral Officer is vital to the planning and delivery of elections in the province, a role that has been exceptionally served by Peter Gzowski since 2013; and

Whereas Mr. Gzowski has shown exemplary leadership through two provincial elections, 11 by-elections, and four judicial recounts, he was even awarded the Elections Nova Scotia QSV Award in 2014 for his dedication to quality improvement, service to colleagues and stakeholders, and contribution of time, talent, and expertise; and

Whereas after eight years of service to the Province and the people of Nova Scotia, Mr. Gzowski has announced his retirement and is completing his last day in office today, March 26th;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House thank Peter Gzowski for his dedication to democracy and service to Nova Scotians, a role that he carried with passion and humility, and wish him a happy retirement.

I request waiver of notice and passage without debate.

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I was just going to ask the indulgence of the House for the unanimous consent to revert back. The Minister of Justice is one of those very tech-savvy people. He reminds me of Penny from Inspector Gadget. He has a computer watch that talks to a book, but he just can't seem to figure out Zoom, so he missed the opportunity to report regulations and other papers a few minutes ago. He's seemed to figure out the really challenging technology of Zoom, so I think we'll give him another shot.

With the consent of the House, we'll revert back to Tabling Reports, Regulations, and Other Papers.

THE SPEAKER: With that very fulsome background information, I'll request consent.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Justice.

RANDY DELOREY: Ms. Speaker, with colleagues like that, I wonder what we need an Opposition for. (Laughter) With that said, in my capacity as the Attorney General of Nova Scotia, I hereby beg leave to table amendments to the Nova Scotia Civil Procedure Rules.

THE SPEAKER: The report is tabled.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 66 - Entitled an Act to Optimize Virtual Healthcare. (Susan Leblanc)

Bill No. 67 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 197 of the Revised Statutes of 1989. The Health Services and Insurance Act, to Expand M.S.I. Coverage. (Susan Leblanc)

Bill No. 68 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 5 of the Acts of 2005. The Emergency Health Services Act. (Susan Leblanc)

THE SPEAKER: Ordered that these bills be read a second time on a future day.

NOTICES OF MOTION

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Queens-Shelburne.

WEIR, DONNA: COM. SERV. - THANKS

KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Queens County resident Donna Weir. When the pandemic took hold of our province last Spring, Donna saw a need and decided to fill it. She immediately began making masks and offered her service to others so that community members could be safe. In fact, the first mask that I wore was made by Donna, who reached out to me because she knew that at times my job required me to be in contact with the public.

Most recently, Donna has made an incredibly generous donation of 100 child-sized masks to be delivered to Dr. John C. Wickwire Academy, an elementary school here in Liverpool.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to applaud Donna for her strong sense of community and her selfless generosity during these unprecedented times.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre.

ESSENTIAL/FRONT-LINE WORKERS: SERV. DURING PANDEMIC - COMMEND

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Speaker, I want to extend my appreciation for all essential workers and front-line workers who continue to work from outside their homes

during the height of the pandemic. These front-line and essential workers continue to come into contact with a high number of individuals, making them more at risk to come in contact with COVID-19. Many of these workers are in low-wage jobs. Many are cleaners, grocery store workers, gas station attendants, laundry workers, food service staff, and many other essential workers who have been on the front lines and make less than \$15 an hour.

All workers in Nova Scotia need better wages and better protection.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg.

BLUENOSE 100th ANNIV.: LAUNCH DAY LIVESTREAM - CELEBRATE

HON. SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: Mr. Speaker, today is an exciting day in my constituency. In just a few minutes, Launch Day Livestream will start in beautiful Lunenburg. This marks the official beginning of the *Bluenose's* 100th anniversary celebrations.

The story of the *Bluenose* began on the drafting table of naval architect William J. Roué more than 100 years ago. With Captain Angus Walters at the helm, she became an international racing icon, winning numerous prestigious awards. Today we remember her spirit and resiliency as we celebrate her 100-year history.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that you and all members of this Legislature join me in wishing Nova Scotia's sailing ambassador fair winds and thank the 100th anniversary committee for planning an exciting year-long celebration.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

VOLUN. AWARDS - RECIPIENTS, LWR. SACKVILLE: COM. SERV. - COMMEND

STEVE CRAIG: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the recipients of the 2020 Volunteer Appreciation Awards for Sackville, Lucasville, and Beaver Bank.

Although our volunteers were not able to be celebrated in the usual manner at the annual Lake District Recreation Appreciation Awards dinner and ceremony, due to COVID-19 health restrictions, they should be very proud of themselves for their commitment and dedication to our communities.

Wilma Treen was recognized as Sackville's Volunteer of the Year. Other volunteers recognized included Terry Sangster, Don Flemming, Jessica Pearson, Cecil Wright, Barbara Wilson, Sheila King, Gary Lucas, Florence Maddox, Jim Hall, Mary Marson, Ron MacIntosh, and Hubert Earle.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all members of the House of Assembly join me in applauding our wonderful volunteers across the province, who do not volunteer for the recognition but do so in order to make their community and our world a better place.

[9:30 a.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

DURLING, MARGOT - ARTIST: *CHOSEN FAMILY* - COMMEND

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I rise to honour a talented and community-minded artist, Margot Durling, who I am very happy to say lives in Dartmouth North. Margot is a nonbinary transgender queer artist, designer, and musician who has built their career with innovative community-based creative work.

If you have walked by the Halifax Common recently, you will have likely seen their public art piece *Chosen Family*. This beautiful installation is made up of five steel poles, brandishing abstract symbols representing various gender identities. The playful, multicoloured symbols reimagine those for man and woman, reminding us that there are a myriad of gender identities beyond the binary.

It was also recently announced that Margot, who works as the creative director at Fathom Studio, is leading a team shortlisted to design a national monument memorializing discrimination against 2SLGBTQ+ people in Canada, funded by the federal government. The announcement about who will be awarded this prestigious design will be announced later this year.

With work that centres and honours 2SLGBTQIA+ identities and community, Margot is doing Dartmouth North and Nova Scotia truly proud.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

CANTWELL, JEFF: RETIREMENT - THANKS

HON. KEITH IRVING: Mr. Speaker, many Nova Scotians will recognize the name Jeff Cantwell, because for many years his name has been synonymous with the Town of Wolfville.

As Wolfville's mayor from 2012 to 2020, and earlier as a councillor and deputy mayor, Jeff was involved in municipal leadership during a period of remarkable development for the Town of Wolfville. Centred at the heart of a growing wine industry, Wolfville has had to deal with many planning and development pressures, requiring a steady hand of leadership.

Citizens know Jeff Cantwell, mayor, as someone who is approachable, visible, congenial, and dedicated to moving ideas forward with the best interests of Wolfville in mind. Having now retired as mayor, Jeff will turn his attention to another great passion of his: ocean sailing.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly to join me in thanking Jeff Cantwell for his many years of public service and wishing him fair winds.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

COMMERCIAL TRUCKERS: CUMB. N. COVID-19 HEROES - THANKS

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, today I would like to recognize some of Cumberland North's COVID-19 heroes: our commercial truckers. These truckers have ensured that supply chains were kept intact. Cumberland North's goods and food supply have been readily available during the pandemic because of our truckers. This has helped keep our local economy going during these unprecedented times.

Our commercial drivers continued to do their jobs while often driving to destinations where there was nothing. Everything was shuttered - no restaurants, no showers, often even no bathrooms available to them. But they didn't quit because they knew that although they are not thanked enough, they, in fact, keep our province fed. They connect our food supply.

Today join me in thanking our commercial truck drivers as some of Cumberland North's, and really all of Nova Scotia's, COVID-19 heroes.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre.

RYAN, DOMINIQUE/RYAN, DAWN: FUN AND PRIZES FUNDRAISING - THANKS

KENDRA COOMBES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to acknowledge Dominique and Dawn Ryan. Dominique, a CCA, and her mom, Dawn Ryan, have raised well over \$30,000 through their online fundraising activity Fun and Prizes.

Dominique and Dawn have raised money to help community members in need, non-profit organizations, and seniors. Through their fundraising efforts they are able to make monthly donations to the SPCA. The daughter and mother team put together Christmas packages for 60 seniors.

Mr. Speaker, Dominique and Dawn's commitment to helping people is commendable and appreciated by all those they've helped.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

DARLING, NATHAN - ATHL.: NBA GAME - CONGRATS.

HON. LENA METLEGE DIAB: Mr. Speaker, on March 13th, Nathan Joseph Darling made Nova Scotia basketball history when he became the first Nova Scotian to play in the NBA regular season.

From playing for the community Y to helping Nova Scotia take the gold medal in the Canadian Under-17 Championship in 2015, Nate has had a steady and impressive climb in his sport. Though he left the province to play high school basketball in Maryland, he never lost his strong connection to home, even helping to win gold for Team Canada at the 2017 Under-19 World Championship.

During his first regular season game, Nate, a shooting guard, played four minutes late in the game for the Charlotte Hornets to win over the Toronto Raptors.

I ask all members of the Legislature to join me in celebrating Nate for making history and congratulating his proud mother, and my friend, Julie Metlege and their entire family.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

MACKEAN, JACKIE JARDINE: CAREER SUCCESS - CONGRATS.

HON. PAT DUNN: Mr. Speaker, having a job you love is fulfilling, especially when you are successful and radiate that success wherever you go.

Jackie Jardine Mackean, editor of the weekly newspaper the *Pictou Advocate*, was intrigued by language when she was a student in junior high school. She always possessed a passion for detail and accuracy, and for finding the right expression to convey a point.

That love of words serves Jackie well in her job at the *Pictou Advocate*. Jackie's role is to polish and refine a story or an article prior to the printing stage. Throughout her approximately three decades in the newspaper business, Jackie continues to be truly satisfied in her many accomplishments.

Jackie Jardine Mackean's professionalism, calming attitude, and a great team player are reasons why she excels at her job.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

LING, DARRELL - ATHL.: INVICTUS GAMES - RECOG.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, the Invictus Games is an international sporting event for sick or injured soldiers and military service personnel. Invictus means unconquered in Latin, a tribute to the athletes who compete at these games.

One of these amazing competitors is Dartmouth North's Darrell Ling. Darrell is one of only 32 Canadian athletes, including four Nova Scotians, named to the Canadian team for the 2020-21 games.

At those games, which were to be held in May 2020 in The Hague, 18 countries would have competed in events including swimming, cycling, chair events, and more. Darrell, who will compete in archery, sit-down rowing, and wheelchair basketball events, worked as a marine electrician in the Royal Canadian Navy and served two tours in the war in Afghanistan.

Like many international sporting events, the Invictus Games were postponed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Whenever they are held, I know that all Nova Scotians will be rooting for Darrell, his Nova Scotia teammates, and the entire Team Canada. I will be one of the loudest cheerleaders and as he continues his training in anticipation of the games, I wish him all the best.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton-Richmond.

**BRAS D'OR WATCH PROG.:
CREATIVE RESPONSE TO PANDEMIC - CONGRATS.**

ALANA PAON: Mr. Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic created a world of uncertainty and forced us to accept a new normal. Many businesses, organizations, and groups were forced to think outside of the box in order to continue working to deliver programs and services.

Today I'd like to highlight the work of the Bras d'Or Lake Biosphere Reserve Association's Bras d'Or Watch program. This popular citizens' science program has taken place every Summer since 2015 and with some minor modifications in 2020, proved to be another successful year for the program.

Mr. Speaker, like many groups, the Bras d'Or Watch program moved to the virtual world. To encourage community involvement, it held a bio-blitz and an online photo contest, to overwhelming success. By the end of July, participants submitted 1,065 observations and photographs of 453 species found in the Bras d'Or watershed, documenting more of the biosphere than they normally have in previous years.

Mr. Speaker, I call upon my fellow members of the Nova Scotia Legislative Assembly to join me in sending our congratulations to the Bras d'Or Lake Biosphere Reserve Association and their continued environmental stewardship.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston-Dartmouth.

SMOOTH MEAL PREP.: BUS. SUCCESS - CONGRATS.

HON. KEITH COLWELL: Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize Nevell Provo of North Preston, who founded Smooth Meal Prep in 2018 to provide healthy meals to close to 1,000 customers each week, while at the same time providing employment to 15 people from the local community.

He started his business in his mother's kitchen, but the business has grown to the point where he has taken over a pizza shop in Westphal to convert it into a 1,500-square foot industrial kitchen. He deals with companies that work with local farmers to source the produce used to prepare his healthy and appetizing meals and employs people from his immediate and extended family, thus creating jobs in the local community.

The market for his fitness-focused meals is busy individuals who do not have time to prepare quality meals but want to eat healthy, local, nutritious food. His background is fitness and athletics, so it is natural his meals focus on fitness and health goals.

Nevell Provo, through his initiative and business acumen is creating jobs while fulfilling a real need for the community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

**WHITE, MATTHEW - MARATHON RUNNER:
RAISING CANCER AWARENESS - THANKS**

TIM HALMAN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Matthew White, who I had the pleasure of meeting at the Dartmouth Terry Fox event last September, hosted by Better Together. My daughters and I were thrilled to meet Mr. White in our capacity as ambassadors for the Terry Fox Foundation.

To mark the 40th anniversary of the Marathon of Hope, Matthew took the initiative to run 40 marathons in Terry Fox's honour. He spent last year training on local trails and started a string of marathons on January 4th. For those of us who have prepared for a marathon, we know the discipline and training that goes into that. Imagine 40, and let us not forget, Mr. Speaker, Terry Fox ran a marathon every day for 101 days.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Matthew White for his work in raising awareness about cancer and raising funds for cancer research. He certainly can teach us a thing or two about what it means to “try like Terry.”

Mr. Speaker, the Marathon of Hope continues.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Chester-St. Margaret’s.

COWARD, LYNN: RETIREMENT - CONGRATS.

HUGH MACKAY: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate and wish a fond farewell to Lynn Coward who is retiring, at the end of March, as the dispatcher for Bay Rides. Bay Rides is an invaluable community transportation service for the St. Margarets Bay area, a service which provides the only access for many folks to get groceries, attend medical appointments, get to work, and many other activities.

Lynn has been with Bay Rides for nearly nine years and has shown an unwavering commitment to this important community service. She has been the friendly voice on the phone for hundreds of people booking with Bay Rides, and she has been a strong advocate for community transportation systems.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all members of the House of Assembly to join me in congratulating Bay Rides’ dispatcher, Lynn Coward, and to thank her for her years of service to this important community transportation service.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Whitney Pier.

PALMER, CHARLIE: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, our community lost a great champion in Charlie Palmer in recent weeks. Charlie passed away at 100 years old. Charlie was a decorated Second World War veteran. He was a former alderman in the city of Sydney, and he spent a great career with the National Railway as a worker.

Charlie was awarded the rank of Knight of the French National Order of the Legion of Honour for helping liberate France during the Second World War, but many people also know Charlie for being one of Cape Breton’s biggest advocates, if not the biggest advocate, for rail. Some people used to refer to him as “choo-choo Charlie” because he always took every opportunity he could to promote the importance of rail for the future of the Island.

So, Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of the House to pass along their best to Charlie’s family. He was a big part of our community for a very long time, and he will be missed.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester-Musquodoboit Valley.

**CARTER, LYLE - INDUCTEE:
MARITIME SPORT HALL OF FAME - CONGRATS.**

LARRY HARRISON: Mr. Speaker, a well-known Colchester County athlete and columnist was one of those honoured in 2020 by entry into the Maritime Sport Hall of Fame.

Brookfield native Lyle Carter graced multiple hockey leagues from 1967 to 1975, including 15 games as goaltender with the Oakland-based National Hockey League team the California Golden Seals in 1971 and 1972. Prior to that, playing fast-pitch softball for the Brookfield Elks, Carter advanced to national championships, winning 10 mainland Nova Scotia league batting championships.

Due to COVID-19, the ceremony for the 2020 Hall of Fame inductees will be included in the 2021 celebrations. I would like to take a moment to congratulate Lyle Carter and all of the 2020 Maritime Sport Hall of Fame inductees on achieving this honour.

[9:45 a.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Guysborough-Eastern Shore-Tracadie.

DORT, JACKIE: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. LLOYD HINES: I rise today in recognition of my friend, the late Jackie Dort, a wonderful woman and councillor for District 6, in Goshen, located in the Municipality of the District of St. Mary's.

Jackie served her people as councillor since 2001, and in 2016 became deputy warden for the Municipality of St. Mary's. The world lost a bright light that was Jackie on July 21st, 2020. She was a pillar in her community, and one that people looked to for help. To Jackie it didn't matter who it was or where they were from, she would always help people. She was devoted to being very effective in representing her community.

In her honour, her family was presented with the establishment of the Deputy Warden Dort Bursary. A \$200 bursary will be given out once a year to a local graduate for the next 19 years, a tribute to the 19 years she served with the municipality. The recipient of this bursary must, like her, exemplify qualities like volunteerism, community involvement, and leadership.

Deputy Warden Jackie Dort will be greatly missed by many. She will always be remembered for her gold standard of public service.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Beaver Bank.

**SQUARE ROOTS/SACKVILLE COM. GARDEN:
FRESH FOOD BUNDLES - THANKS**

BRAD JOHNS: I rise today to acknowledge the many volunteers of the Sackville Community Food Garden and Square Roots Sackville.

The charity group Square Roots has been working hard recently with the Sackville Community Food Garden to deliver fresh food bundles to the people in need in Sackville.

Due to COVID-19, many people are out of work and struggling to feed their families. The food bundles provided by Square Roots Sackville and the Sackville Community Food Garden have been helping to alleviate some of the stress on families in these trying times.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank those volunteers of Square Roots Sackville and the Sackville Community Food Garden for their hard work in helping to make these difficult times a little easier on the people of Sackville and Beaver Bank.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville.

SCHOOL COM.: DEDICATED/WILLING TO COLLABORATE - THANKS

HON. BEN JESSOME: I would like to recognize the school community of Hammonds Plains-Lucasville.

To say the least, COVID-19 has created challenges in all our lives. With all the necessary precautions and restrictions, the beginning of the school year was certainly a different kick-off compared to what we've grown to look forward to. Dedication and willingness of the school community to work together to provide our students with a safe and happy learning environment was and is exceptional. Quickly developing effective ways to ensure our students remain safe and to enable public health protocols has been well-handled. This is a wonderful example of the resilience that Nova Scotians possess.

Changes haven't always been easy, but teachers, administrators, staff, bus drivers, parents, guardians, and most importantly students - everyone has stepped up to the task. I would ask all members of this House to join me in commending the school community of Hammonds Plains-Lucasville for their continued ability and collaboration with Public Health and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to ensure that our students have a safe and enjoyable place to live, learn, and become the leaders of tomorrow.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour-Eastern Passage.

**COUSINEAU, MEDRIC/COUSINEAU, JOCELYN:
PAWS FUR THOUGHT - THANKS**

BARBARA ADAMS: Today is Purple Day, and we wear purple to raise awareness about epilepsy, but I rise today to recognize Medric and Jocelyn Cousineau of Eastern Passage for founding Paws Fur Thought, as well as for being the recent recipients of the Meritorious Service Cross (Civil Division) from the Governor General of Canada.

The service that is offered through Paws Fur Thought is pairing first responders and veterans that have been affected by operational stress injuries with PTSD service dogs.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to join me in thanking Medric and Jocelyn Cousineau for their compassion, as well as their foresight to see the very real need that these first responders and veterans have to face and have been struggling with, and finally, last but not least, for offering hope in many cases where there wasn't any.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Chester-St. Margaret's.

GLOVER, JOHN/GLOVER, SHELLEY: RETIREMENT - CONGRATS.

HUGH MACKAY: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate John and Shelley Glover on their retirements from one of St. Margarets Bay's iconic businesses, Redmond's Home Hardware.

John Glover was always a handyman, and when Redmond's Home Hardware first opened in 1980, he quickly became one of their biggest customers. John and Shelley purchased Redmond's Home Hardware 20 years later and ran the shop until 2021.

John and Shelley have been active members of the St. Margarets Bay community and, in fact, held the chair of that society. Now John's son Colin Glover, with partners Al Bardsley and Kathryn Foote, have purchased Redmond's and are looking forward to continuing the good work of John and Shelley, as well as applying their own stamp to the business.

I invite all the members of the House of Assembly to join me in congratulating John and Shelley Glover on their success with Redmond's Home Hardware and wish them all the happiness in their retirement years.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

BLUENOSE CENTENNIAL: PANDEMIC SAIL PASTS - THANKS

HON. LEO GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, today citizens across our province and beyond will celebrate the *Bluenose* centennial. Over the past 100 years, *Bluenose* has had

crews exemplify tenacity, leading the schooner to truly have no equal. She brought in some of the largest catches ever recorded by a schooner and was created by shipwrights, sailmakers, and the community of Lunenburg.

This past summer, this sense of community formed by *Bluenose* was felt again as *Bluenose II* sailed past multiple communities along our coast, including in Kings West. Many conveyed to me that this was the first time they were able to see *Bluenose II* in all her glory, and this came at a time when many of our residents needed a feeling of hope. This is exactly what *Bluenose II* offered, and for many it will be a moment that they will never forget.

Mr. Speaker, as we celebrate the *Bluenose* centennial, I would ask members of this House to join me in recognizing those who made the Sail Past Summer possible, the crew, and *Bluenose II* for offering the people of Kings West and the province the opportunity to see this magnificent vessel and symbol of hope.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle-Barrington.

COMEAU, MICHEL: RETRAITE - FÉLICITATIONS

COLTON LEBLANC: Monsieur le Président, après une carrière de 38 ans, dont cinq ans à titre de directeur général du Conseil scolaire acadien provincial, Monsieur Michel Comeau a annoncé sa retraite à la fin de son mandat en juillet 2021.

Michel Comeau a dédié toute sa carrière en l'éducation au service de la population acadienne et francophone de la province en tant qu'enseignant, directeur d'école et divers rôles au sein de l'administration du CSAP. Il a contribué à de nombreux projets scolaires réalisés partout dans notre province.

Je demande à tous les députés de cette Assemblée de se joindre à moi pour féliciter Monsieur Michel Comeau pour sa retraite bien méritée et lui souhaiter tout le meilleur lorsqu'il commence le prochain chapitre de sa vie.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford.

CASSIDY, MEGAN: PURPLE DAY, EPILEPSY AWARENESS - COMMEND

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, March 26th is known as Purple Day, a grassroots event formed to increase worldwide awareness of epilepsy and to dispel common myths and fears of this neurological disorder.

Nova Scotian Cassidy Megan conceived of Purple Day when she was only nine years old. The Epilepsy Association of Nova Scotia joined in Cassidy's quest, as did the

U.S.-based Anita Kaufmann Foundation in 2009. This increased awareness of Purple Day immensely.

Cassidy's member of Parliament, Halifax West MP Geoff Regan, introduced a private member's bill to make March 26th an annual day for epilepsy awareness here in Canada. It received Royal Assent in March 2012, and Canada remains the only country to officially recognize the day.

I'd like to congratulate Cassidy Megan on taking her movement worldwide and helping to dispel myths and fears of this often misunderstood disease.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

**PETTET, BRETTE - ATHL.:
2021 NCAA WOMEN'S HOCKEY CHAMP - CONGRATS.**

JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate Brette Pettet, a local Kentville woman who is a senior forward and the co-captain of the Wisconsin Badgers Hockey Team. Pettet and the Wisconsin Badgers are the 2021 NCAA women's hockey champions for the second time in three years.

The Badgers won the national championship in Pettet's sophomore season, 2019, and were in a position to repeat the following year. However, the 2020 nationals were abruptly cancelled due to COVID-19, before Wisconsin's quarter-final game. The win is very special for Brette Pettet, as one of the reasons she chose to go to the University of Wisconsin was to have an opportunity to win a national championship, and she certainly did.

Please join me in congratulating Brette Pettet for her leadership and accomplishments as a Wisconsin Badger.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

CASSIDY, MEGAN: PURPLE DAY, EPILEPSY AWARENESS - COMMEND

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In honour of Purple Day, I wish to highlight Cassidy Megan, the founder of the movement. In 2008 Cassidy created Purple Day to raise awareness about the neurological disorder epilepsy. She was just nine years old. She spread the word by talking to her family members and involving her school, which was Halifax West, in my riding.

Cassidy reached out to all levels of government, including the prime minister, who supported the cause to end stigma. In 2012 the Canadian government passed the Purple Day Act, making Purple Day an official law in Canada. More than 100 countries celebrate

Purple Day and it affects roughly 65 million people. Cassidy says that epilepsy is part of us, but it does not define us.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the members of this House to join me in applauding Cassidy Megan for her bravery in sharing her story and helping end the stigma of epilepsy.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West.

JAMIESON-MILLS, HEIDI: 100 MOST POWERFUL WOMEN - CONGRATS.

KARLA MACFARLANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to congratulate Heidi Jamieson-Mills on being named to Canada's Most Powerful Women: Top 100 list in December. Heidi is the senior vice-president of finance, reporting and treasury at Sobeys. Prior to this designation, she was awarded with an INTACT Professionals award which recognizes women who are leaders within their organizations.

Heidi began her career with Sobeys in high school and through the years progressed on to more senior roles. She is an involved community member, particularly with supporting local health, and currently sits on the board of directors for the Aberdeen Health Foundation.

Mr. Speaker, I once again congratulate Heidi Jamieson-Mills on this wonderful achievement and wish her all the best on her future endeavours.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

BURTON, KYLE - PHOTOGRAPHER: O'BRIEN AWARD - CONGRATS.

HON. KAREN CASEY: Mr. Speaker, Kyle Burton from Masstown, Colchester North, grew up in a family that raised horses and although he had no interest in being hands-on with the animals, he developed an interest in photography at the track.

In February 2020, Burton received his second O'Brien Award for photography. His photo is called *Under the Spotlight* and is a nighttime shot taken during last year's Gold Cup & Saucer in Charlottetown. Two years ago, Burton received his first O'Brien Award for his photo *Dusty Lane Appearance*, which showed a horse coming through a cloud of dust to the finish line.

Currently, Burton works in business development at the Centre for Ocean Ventures and Entrepreneurship (COVE) in Dartmouth, where he also puts his photography skills to work. He has also been the track photographer at the Truro Raceway for several years.

Our congratulations to Kyle for twice receiving the prestigious O'Brien Award. We wish him continued success and we'll see him at the track.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Truro-Bible Hill-Millbrook-Salmon River.

PRYOR, DEB: COM. SERV. - THANKS

DAVE RITCEY: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and acknowledge a community member who has shown great dedication and confidence in the community. As the president of the East End Community Association, Debbie Pryor has shown great commitment to the east end of Truro by encouraging community members to join the association and advocating to ensure that the east end community is a safe and desirable place for families to move and live.

She was a key part of the development of the Herb Peppard Community Park, which commemorates a distinguished Second World War veteran and long-time resident of the east end of Truro. She recently helped secure a \$25,000 donation from the CN Halifax Community Board to assist with the safety of upgrades to the park for all children to enjoy.

I would like to thank Deb Pryor for caring, dedication, and passion to the east end of the community of Truro.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much. The time allotted for members' statements has expired.

The House will now recess for its mandated 15-minute COVID-19 protocol break.

The House will resume at 10:15 a.m.

[10:01 a.m. The House recessed.]

[10:15 a.m. The House reconvened.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: PUB. HEALTH - LISTEN/DIRECT

TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, the other day in Question Period, the Premier made kind of a ham-fisted attempt to accuse me of promoting vaccine hesitancy. We all had a bit of a chuckle over that because, of course, in fact, people know that I am standing in this

House repeatedly asking - practically begging - the Premier to get more vaccine into Nova Scotians with more urgency.

The statement did give me pause for thought. Sometimes the Premier makes statements and he talks about how he listens to Public Health; sometimes he makes statements how he directs Public Health; sometimes he says the process is apolitical; and sometimes he says he is the political master of the process.

It just makes me curious, Mr. Speaker, as to if maybe the Premier can explain - how does the Premier decide when he should direct Public Health or when he should listen to Public Health?

HON. IAIN RANKIN (The Premier): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Nova Scotians for getting us to the place that we are today - one of the safest places in Canada. That is why people from all over Canada are starting to look at Nova Scotia as a beacon of hope. More people are moving here with their families, creating economic prosperity in the province because we have led the country, listened to Public Health.

We've adopted masks earlier than most jurisdictions, and we adopted asymptomatic testing more than most jurisdictions. We are going to continue to listen to Public Health, and, yes, we direct once we have that advice from Public Health. We make the decisions.

TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, we have done well with the case counts in this province because we - Nova Scotians - have listened, but the language around directing Public Health is new with the new Premier.

We never saw that over the past year when things were going well. We have actually seen some confusion and some walk-backs since the new Premier. That is why I am curious as to the dynamic there. We know the Premier directed Public Health on the AstraZeneca vaccines. He mentioned the other day that he directed Public Health to prioritize a certain group in the vaccine rollout. We were relieved when police officers were re-prioritized.

I wonder - and I would like to ask the Premier. Did the Premier direct Public Health on that issue, too, with the police, putting them on the priority list?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, we are going to continue to stay in lockstep with Public Health. It has showed how it worked in Wave 1, how we flattened the curve, and in Wave 2 we are flattening the curve. We have low cases. Our schools are open, our businesses - we have a semblance of normalcy here, and we are going to continue to prioritize people in the vaccine program as it continues to roll out and stay positive.

We have the infrastructure set up, and we are ready to ramp up. Every single day we are getting more and more doses in arms - 5,700 yesterday. We are hitting record-breaking days and weeks, and we are ready for the next volume uptake from the federal government.

TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, I am glad we are hitting record numbers. We need to get more vaccines up. We need to catch up to the rest of the country who are also putting more and more in arms every single day. I am hopeful that we can catch up.

I wanted to go back to something I raised the other day about people with underlying health conditions. I documented a long list of conditions that would get you a priority vaccination in other provinces, just not here. Transplants, people with transplants, people with cancer, people with heart disease, people with Down syndrome - all kinds of conditions, risks of serious complications will get you an earlier vaccination in another province, but just not here.

We know that the Premier sometimes directs Public Health on different groups, but I would like to go back and ask the Premier: Does he plan to ask Public Health to prioritize this particular group of people in terms of the vaccine rollout?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is saying that sometimes we are offside with Public Health when, indeed - I don't know if he watches the briefings but Doctor Strang has addressed this very point.

Our focus is on population immunity, making sure that we focus on those who are over the age of 80, getting close to descending down into those that are in the age of 70, making sure that we are out into First Nation clinics. Now all First Nations have had an opportunity to get their first shot. We are working with the African Nova Scotian community, and we do have prioritization with long-term care centres, health care workers. We need to ensure that we are continuously looking at the population as a whole.

Our case counts are low. That gives us the opportunity to continue with an effective, efficient delivery of the vaccine.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the New Democratic Party.

PREM.: AMBULANCE FEES - FAIRNESS

GARY BURRILL: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday our caucus learned from officials in the Department of Health and Wellness that the amount that the government had brought in last year from patients for ambulance services was \$14.3 million.

I would like to ask the Premier: Does he think it is fitting or appropriate in our universal health care system, in our public health care system, that the government should be collecting over \$14 million in user fees from people in urgent, distressing medical situations?

THE PREMIER: Our EMS service has been doing well over the last number of decades - a pioneer service in North America. There is a Fitch report that looks at ways that we can make that service more efficient by utilizing staff more appropriately and improving off-load times. That's the work that's under way.

We're going to continue to look at the recommendations, most of which are already in implementation. We're going to look at that report very closely to ensure that we are remaining cutting edge in the country.

GARY BURRILL: What I am asking about, specifically, Mr. Speaker is the financial consideration from the point of view of patients.

Recently, the government reported that last year, the Department of Health and Wellness had written off debts as "uncollectable" in the amount of \$4.7 million and that a significant component of those uncollectable debts were uncollectable bills that had been sent out for ambulance services.

Doesn't it indicate, when we see that such a high percentage of the bills that have been sent out in the province for ambulance services in a year, have proven to be uncollectable, that those bills are being sent out to patients in the first place who can't afford them?

THE PREMIER: I want to thank those health care workers who continue to provide cutting-edge service to Nova Scotians, one that we should be always looking for continuous improvement on. There are programs that help support low income Nova Scotians. Low income Nova Scotians actually do have an opportunity to get that fee that the member opposite referenced waived.

GARY BURRILL: What the Premier said is, of course, the case. It is also the case, and I will table the source of this, that 23 per cent of people in our region report that in the past they have made the decision not to call an ambulance - in a situation where they otherwise would have made that call - because of the financial considerations.

Surely there are many situations where this has a negative effect in terms of delaying treatments, or where it has a negative effect from the point of view of conditions worsening. Doesn't the Premier agree that in moments of distress and 911 urgency that people shouldn't have to be weighed down with considerations about the money and the bill?

THE PREMIER: People should not have to worry about financial considerations when it comes to health care. That's why we do have the ambulance fee waiver program for those who are low income. We will continue to make sure that we're looking at that program to ensure that the income cut-off is at an appropriate level. I'll make sure that I take that back and have a look at the program.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM: N.B. BORDER - DECISION

TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, we've seen this Premier walk back a school site selection decision in Eastern Shore. We've seen this Premier walk back accepting AstraZeneca vaccines. We've seen this Premier walk back when police should receive the vaccine. We've seen this Premier walk back his second attempt at Bill No. 4.

Now we're stuck in a position where he has been caught exerting political influence on Public Health over the border issue. And he's in a jam on this one. The Premier jumped the gun in terms of his fellow Premiers.

Does the Premier intend to walk the border decision back, too, or risk it out?

THE PREMIER: I want to be clear about this: I will make no decision without having the advice of Dr. Strang and Public Health first, Mr. Speaker.

That decision on the border was brought to me by Dr. Strang, actually. He came to me and said there's no reason why we should have that border shut down with the exact same epidemiology in New Brunswick as in Nova Scotia. I gave the opportunity to New Brunswick to follow suit. They decided not to at that time.

Now we're looking at a case increase in the northern region of New Brunswick. That's the area they put in the red zone, and that's why we acted quickly on the advice of Dr. Strang to say no travel inside of that region in the Edmundston and surrounding area.

TIM HOUSTON: If you come from P.E.I., where there are eight active cases, you isolate for 14 days. If you come from Newfoundland and Labrador, where there is one active case, you isolate for 14 days. Different story when it comes to New Brunswick, where there are 89 active cases.

My question for the Premier is: Why did the Premier rush ahead when his more seasoned colleagues as premiers in the other provinces suggested it was best to wait?

THE PREMIER: What he said is just not accurate, Mr. Speaker. When you come from P.E.I., you don't have to self-isolate. You haven't had to since the last Atlantic Maritime Bubble. That's the reality.

He continues to bring forward information in this House that's not accurate. I'm going to continue to base my decisions on evidence and on facts with health care, with the environment - we have an important climate crisis to deal with, biodiversity loss to deal with - and that member continues to try to pit one region of the province against the other. Yesterday his caucus was trying to take on our public servants.

This government and the Liberal Party will continue to look at the evidence and science when we make our decisions.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

FTB: ALC - FREE VOUCHERS

MURRAY RYAN: My question is directed toward the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board. I want to return to a topic I raised a few days ago regarding online gambling and gambling addictions.

As you recall, the Atlantic Lottery Corporation has recently opened up its online gaming casino. I questioned the wisdom of such a move when everyone was still staying close to home. Now it has come to my attention that the Atlantic Lottery Corporation is mailing out free-play vouchers to all Nova Scotians.

I get that free-play vouchers are a common and accepted promotion in the gambling industry, but I'm not sure I agree with using public money to do so.

My question to the minister: Is he aware that public money is being used to incentivize gambling in this province?

HON. LABI KOUSOULIS: Atlantic Lotto provides a service to Nova Scotians. When they looked at online gambling it was a service that was being provided from other countries where it was unregulated, and it was actually putting Nova Scotians at a lot of harm. They did the research to make sure that they could provide it in a safe and effective manner. As well, through the funding and what comes from Atlantic Lotto, we provide programs to help those with addictions and to help those who need help with gambling.

MURRAY RYAN: I'd like to redirect my supplementary to the Minister of Health and Wellness, or the Minister responsible for Office of Mental Health and Addictions.

Just to restate, we have Nova Scotians staying at home more, as we all do our best to follow the COVID-19 protocols. While we're staying at home, the Province, through ALC, decides to open and run online gambling. Now we find that ALC isn't just offering an opportunity to play online, they're actually incentivizing it with public money, and again, all while removing the dedicated funding for gambling addiction.

My question to the minister responsible for the Office of Mental Health and Addictions: Is he comfortable with using public money to incentivize online gambling?

[10:30 a.m.]

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Just to clarify for the member, no funding has been eliminated from supports for those with gambling addictions. We've actually put more money into the front lines to support those folks.

The move to bring in this regulated online gambling forum, as the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board said, was done so that Nova Scotians who were choosing to gamble - because they will, and have other sources - were doing so in a regulated format where there's actually tools for intervention. People monitor gambling behaviour, and folks who support those in trouble reach out when they see problematic situations.

We have enhanced our supports for mental health for gambling and addictions awareness. We now have a safer venue for Nova Scotians to partake in that, if they choose to.

THE SPEAKER: To the honourable member for Northside-Westmount, I'll get you to table the document that you had earlier there. Sorry about that.

The honourable member for Northside-Westmount, on a new question.

H&W - ONLINE CASINO: MENTAL HEALTH RISKS - COMMENT

MURRAY RYAN: If I recall, the question I asked was: Was the minister comfortable with using public money to encourage online gambling?

Mr. Speaker, I want to stick with this a little longer because I feel there has been a really short-sighted decision made with regard to the new provincially run online casino, again launched when many Nova Scotians are staying close to home and with limited options for entertainment and now actively recruiting players with free-play vouchers.

When I first raised this with the minister on Wednesday, part of his response was, "What I hear from clinicians is that gambling addiction can oftentimes be associated with other mental health disorders or struggles as well," a statement that matches everything I have learned about gambling addictions. I think we also accept that COVID-19 has been an unprecedented mental health event in this province as well, which adds an element of vulnerability.

My question to the minister is: Given his own awareness of the correlation between addictions and general mental health, does he still feel that this was the best environment to open an online casino?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I very much appreciate the intent of the question. I do believe in having a regulated environment for people who choose to do this because if they do not have a regulated format to do this, they may very well choose to utilize other sources, which is what was happening.

To have a regulated format for this, with intervention opportunities, I think, is a better option for Nova Scotians. Furthermore, we are enhancing our mental health and addictions services here in Nova Scotia through a number of means, expanding our virtual options that are available for people having single sessions. That can now be available for Nova Scotians. We have a crisis line. We have hired more clinicians, and we will be hiring a clinician to coordinate supports across government departments. That will be housed here in the Department of Health and Wellness.

This is a very important issue, and we're going to continue to invest and support Nova Scotians who are dealing with mental health and addictions, including gambling issues and the likes.

MURRAY RYAN: I would like to redirect back to the minister responsible for alcohol, gaming, fuel and tobacco.

Today I want to touch on just one more piece. For as long as Nova Scotia has had its two brick and mortar casinos, it has had a voluntary exclusion program. Under this program, patrons ask the casino to help them manage their play by denying them access to the casino itself. It is a good and important program, but I don't know how effective it is when ALC is offering a casino at everyone's fingertips. I get that there are other online offerings that could easily tempt excluded players, but I think that the province has an obligation to try and honour the exclusion program.

My question to the minister is: What protocols are in place to keep excluded patrons off the ALC casino site?

HON. LABI KOUSOULIS: The programs that are available at the casino are available through our online mechanism as well. With our online mechanism, we'll be able to monitor those who are gambling. We'll be able to reach out to them. It gives us a lot more ability to use our tools to help those who need help with their gambling addictions and be able to monitor it.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I will point out that there are thousands of online gambling sites throughout the world. Nova Scotians are on those, and those are unsafe sites. The betting limits are much higher than what the Atlantic Lottery Corporation has set. Once people are reaching outside of the Canadian jurisdiction, there is no way for us to help them with gambling. This is a way to help Nova Scotians.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

PREM.: ADDICTION SUPPORTS - COMMIT

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. I am devastated to stand and say that 45 people died in Nova Scotia in 2020 from opioid overdose. Earlier this month, we learned of yet another death. I was glad to see the increased funding for overdose prevention from the Nova Scotia Health Authority.

Recently a group of health professionals, the Canadian Association of People Who Use Drugs, and allies were convened through Dalhousie University to put together a policy statement in support of safe supply in Nova Scotia. They point out that unless the government supports access to safe drug supply, overdose deaths like these will continue to happen.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier commit to ensuring a safe supply of drugs is available in Nova Scotia?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, we are going to need to continue to focus on earlier intervention in health care, especially when it comes to addictions, and safe supply is something that we are going to need to make sure that we do more of in the province.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Well, I would like to thank the Premier for that answer and look forward to seeing what comes of that.

Mr. Speaker, addictions support programs need to be accessible in order to be effective. This is why I was so surprised and dismayed to learn that Nova Scotia Health Authority is moving three Mental Health and Addictions locations out of downtown Dartmouth and out to the very edge of the area where clients are concentrated. Of course, a brand-new building is good news for lots of reasons, but for many people in Dartmouth this change in location means an hour-long trip on public transit or not accessing the services at all.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier commit to making mental health and addictions services truly accessible to the people in Dartmouth who need them?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I'm aware of the consolidation of those three clinics. My understanding is it is close to a Metro Transit stop for access. We are going to continue to provide better mental health and addictions services across the whole province, and that is why we brought in a number of programs for single session therapy across the province for withdrawal management.

These are important initiatives that we want to take action on right away as we develop the Office of Mental Health and Addictions with expertise from a clinician, from psychologists, from other competencies, to make sure that we understand the issues from

a core, from why, that they are developed from the beginning to end. Those early interventions are so important, and we will see a renewed focus on it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West.

H&W: COVID-19 LONG-HAUL CASES - UPDATE

KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, part of the pandemic that is very much a story in other places, but rarely ever mentioned in Nova Scotia, are the long-haulers. I am sure everyone has heard of these cases, where mostly younger people who have recovered from their acute bout of COVID-19 are left with long-term, often debilitating, symptoms such as fatigue and brain fog and short-term memory, erratic heartbeat, and many more other symptoms.

The description of long-haul COVID-19 can be downright terrifying, and it is awful to see. Harvard Medical School actually just came out and reported that studies indicate that as many as 80 per cent of moderate COVID-19 patients are suffering from long-haul COVID-19. This article is actually being tabled right now in the Chamber.

My question for the Minister of Health and Wellness is: With 1,700 confirmed cases of COVID-19, is the minister aware of any long-haul cases in Nova Scotia?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I would not be aware of individual cases with COVID-19. We do follow confidentiality rules in relation to that, but I have spoken to Doctor Strang and our Public Health officials and have been informed that if there are any long-haul cases here in Nova Scotia, those folks are continually monitored by physicians in our system.

This is another reason why, even as we start to roll out vaccines, we still need to be vigilant, follow Public Health protocols, and each do our part to keep each other safe by wearing our masks, washing our hands, and limiting social gatherings as much as possible.

KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for his answer. I really think that we are going to have to pay major attention to this because, as I said, these symptoms are actually quite frightening, and the frequency of cases is quite alarming.

It goes to show that the pandemic will definitely cast a long shadow for those who have lost loved ones, for those who are suffering from increased mental health burdens, and for these long-haulers. They cannot be ignored. For Nova Scotia, even with our low case numbers - which everyone is very proud of - we are looking at another chronic disease that we can expect will be around for a long time. We cannot ignore this; time is of the essence.

My question for the Minister of Health and Wellness: Has the Department of Health and Wellness considered doing an analysis of the long-term costs that will be associated with caring for those with long-haul COVID-19?

ZACH CHURCHILL: I agree with the member. The majority of aspects of this - every aspect of this pandemic is concerning, the long-haul cases in particular. We are expanding our Public Health services and our infections prevention folks here, so we do have a very capable team. They are small but mighty, and that group is in the process of getting some more resources to expand their capacity.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

H&W: CERVICAL CANCER TEST BACKLOG - ADDRESS

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, HPV is the leading cause of cervical cancer among women. Our Party inquired on March 23rd in Question Period about the pausing of cancer screenings and surgery backlogs.

The Minister of Health and Wellness's response implied that things were actually rolling smoothly; we didn't need to worry. Abbey Ferguson, the health promotion coordinator from the Halifax Sexual Health Centre, recently stated in an interview that the clinic does only 25 to 30 pap tests per week and she said, "We are wildly backed up . . . We simply do not have enough primary care providers for our population."

Pap smears detect cervical cancer and when pap smears are not caught up, cervical cancer grows undetected and the consequences are deadly. I would like to ask the Minister of Health and Wellness: Does the minister have an accelerated plan to catch up on these pap smear diagnostic tests that detect cervical cancer, and what are the details of this plan?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, the pandemic did impact health delivery services across this province, not just in Nova Scotia, but indeed across the world. We are in the process of getting our screenings back up in place. There are some wait times associated with that because of the delays over COVID-19, but we have also put more resources in place, and we have hired more nurse practitioners in our province.

I know that there is a wait-list, but our folks are continually working through this process to do their very best to catch up.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I would like to know if there is a specific plan for well women clinics for pap smear screening because it is a very specific need.

Here is another quote from Abbey Ferguson regarding the backlog being placed on Nova Scotia women: "Every step of getting a Pap, for a lot of people, is a struggle. It's a

struggle to get through on the phones, it's a struggle to get an appointment in a timely manner that works for you."

Mr. Speaker, women do not always have access to cervical screening for cancer here in Nova Scotia even before the pandemic and now it seems to be much worse. I am worried about my fellow women in this province who are not getting cancer detected early and this will lead to unnecessary, early mortality.

Cervical cancer is especially hard for all of us to accept, myself included, because we know that with early detection, it's almost always curable.

My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness is: Will the minister commit to making women's health and early cancer screening pap smear clinics a priority for the province?

ZACH CHURCHILL: Of course, catching up on the backlog for these procedures, along with other really critical procedures in Nova Scotia, like elective surgeries and other cancer screenings including colon screening, are the system's priority right now.

Our staff and clinicians are working diligently to do just that. Of course, women's health is critically important, and that is why in this budget we have invested more dollars to actually have sexualized trauma supports available, not just for women but for men across the province, as well. This is an area of focus for us and we will continue to prioritize this area.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle-Barrington.

H&W - SOUTHWEST N.S.: POOR VACCINE ROLLOUT - RESPOND

COLTON LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, the southwestern zone of Nova Scotia has had a poor vaccination rollout. Draw a line from Digby to Liverpool and there are no AstraZeneca clinics west of that line.

Mr. Speaker, I have constituents who need to travel upwards to an hour and a half in order to get vaccinated. The southwestern region of our province is very large, and this government has created a dead zone.

The government has claimed that it is okay that we are behind in vaccinating because they are ahead in planning, but meanwhile southwestern Nova Scotia does not have anything close to a convenient access to AstraZeneca vaccines.

I would like to ask the Minister of Health and Wellness: How does he explain the failure to provide equal access to all southwestern Nova Scotia?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: The information that the member provided is not accurate. We do have a vaccine clinic in Yarmouth at the Burrige Campus. We have had long-term care facilities being vaccinated, and we've had a health clinic in the Yarmouth Regional Hospital that is providing vaccines to our first responders and other medical staff that meet the criteria.

[10:45 a.m.]

The AstraZeneca rollout was dependent on volunteers from our pharmacy associations and from Doctors Nova Scotia, so we worked through both organizations to identify as many locations as possible. There were none in Yarmouth that were able to do this for the first batch of AstraZeneca. That's not their fault. That supply came in very late, and there was a deadline on it, but we did work with them to find access points in every single region of the province, and I'm happy to say that all 13,000 doses are in arms already.

COLTON LEBLANC: The honourable minister tried to frame my question as being inaccurate. I'm not sure, in fact, if you listen to it, the context of the question was specifically to AstraZeneca.

Again, you draw a line from Digby to Liverpool. West of that, there are no AstraZeneca clinics. The minister and I have a neighbouring constituency, so I'm sure that he's getting the same calls that I'm getting. People are anxious and confused. They see vaccines rolling out in other parts of our country and other parts of the world. More vaccines to more people everywhere but here. People are left with hours to travel. Even when the AstraZeneca clinics arrive in Yarmouth and Shelburne Counties, I wonder how far residents will have to travel to get that long-awaited shot in the arm.

My question again for the minister: How can the government claim we are leading vaccination efforts when I have to rise in this House and ask the Minister of Health and Wellness why people are being overlooked and neglected?

ZACH CHURCHILL: The Party opposite continues to try and undermine public confidence in the vaccine rollout, but the proof is going to be in the pudding. If the member had watched the technical briefing that Dr. Strang and the Premier conducted last week, he would see the map of Nova Scotia with access points in almost every single community across the province as supply amps up.

The more supply that comes in, the more locations there are going to be. I hope the Opposition keeps talking about this, because June is going to come very quickly and we're going to get, so long as supply remains intact, first-dose vaccines in the arms of everybody who wants one.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

PREM. - IUDs: MSI COVERAGE - COMMIT

CLAUDIA CHENDER: My question is for the Premier. On March 10th of last year, in closing third reading of Bill No. 242, Protecting Access to Reproductive Health Care Act - my bill - I raised the issue of differential access to IUDs. An IUD costs \$400, and while this may be covered by the Family Pharmacare Program or by private insurance, it is not covered by MSI.

The former Premier at that time committed to go back and look at whether government could address this gap, right on the floor of this Chamber. Unfortunately, in response to a follow-up letter we wrote in October, the then-Minister of Health and Wellness suggested that no action had been taken and none was planned.

Will the Premier commit to adding IUDs to the list of services covered by MSI?

THE PREMIER: I don't have background information on this important issue, but I can assure the member opposite that I'll engage in discussions to get caught up to speed and where that discussion left off with the Minister of Health and Wellness.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I thank the Premier for that response.

Contraceptives are basic preventive health care that should be free and easy to obtain. Many organizations have advocated for access to free contraception, including the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Pediatric Society, and the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada. MSI does cover more expensive services like hysterectomy, vasectomy, tubal ligation, and surgical abortion, some of which can be avoided with this compassionate, low-cost intervention in preventive women's health care. But not contraceptives. Those aren't covered, Mr. Premier.

Will the Premier agree to provide - I apologize for addressing the member directly - will the Premier agree to provide free coverage for prescription and emergency contraceptives for all Nova Scotians?

THE PREMIER: I want to thank the member for bringing the issue to the floor of the Legislature, a very important issue that we'll definitely go back and have that discussion to see where the IUD discussion was left off previous to me, as well as other issues I know along the lines of contraceptives that we'll look at as well.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

H&W: VACCINE PLAN - PHASE 1/PHASE 2

JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Recently, I communicated with a parent who has an adult child living in a Department of

Community Services small-option home. This parent does not understand the COVID-19 vaccine plan, specifically why you are skipping phases and priorities.

In your published plan, you state - and I will table that - Phase 1 initial doses include: health care workers who work directly with patients in hospital or patients in their home, paramedics and medical first responders; people who work in long-term care facilities; people who live in long-term care facilities and their designated caregivers; people who live and work in Department of Community Services facilities like residential care centres and regional rehabilitation centres.

This parent came to me because their adult child has not been vaccinated. The plan states people who live and work. The staff have been vaccinated, but . . .

THE SPEAKER: Does the member have a question?

JOHN LOHR: ... and Phase 2 of the vaccination plan is now clearly under way, but Phase 1 has not been completed.

My question for the minister is: What do I say to these parents who feel their family member has been left behind by the move to Phase 2 before Phase 1 was completed?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I would encourage the member to share with that individual the same information that I've been telling people who are concerned, who want to get vaccinated, and who are rightfully fearful of this pandemic - that Nova Scotia is on a very efficient track to get to herd immunity in the quickest route possible. This is the best thing that we can do for everybody, including those with underlying health conditions.

We're well on our way. We're hitting new records every single day. The number of vaccines going in arms has had an exponential rise every day this week. That is going to continue as supply amps up because we have a distribution plan in place. We have great partners with our pharmacies and our doctors and the Public Health clinics that we've set up. We're going to hit our target, so long as supply remains intact, for June.

JOHN LOHR: I'd like to thank the minister for that answer, but it unfortunately was slightly muffled. I did not hear all of it.

Mr. Speaker, I have constituents who are rightly worried about their adult child's safety. Even though your government does not vaccinate those with underlying conditions - though most provinces do - you have seen the wisdom in getting the vaccine to those in residential care, but the best-laid plans are only as good as the execution. When a parent hears staff have been vaccinated, but their family member has not, they start to wonder. This is not to pit staff against residents because anyone who is offered a vaccine should take it.

My question for the minister is: Is his department in direct communication with residents and their families who have been left behind and letting them know when they will be vaccinated, or are they left to wonder what's going on?

THE SPEAKER: I'd just like to remind the honourable member to keep your questions indirect and through the Chair to members opposite.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, all the information is available online for when the vaccine milestones will be met and where the access points are going to be. That is all available on the Public Health website.

The Premier and Dr. Strang went through a technical briefing on that. I would encourage every member and everybody watching to review that because all the information is in there - the rationale behind this plan, where the access points are, and when people are going to get their vaccines.

Obviously, vaccinating staff in these facilities is very important because that creates a layer of protection for the residents, even if they have not been vaccinated yet. I understand why people might be concerned about that, but that is part of the layered protection that those folks are getting along with, of course, the other Public Health safety protocols that are in place in those facilities.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester-Musquodoboit Valley.

H&W: COM. HEALTH TEAMS - AVAILABILITY

LARRY HARRISON: My question is going to be for the Minister of Health and Wellness.

Finding out that you or a loved one has an illness can be very overwhelming. Suddenly a person is thrust into an unfamiliar environment, hearing a lot of unfamiliar words, and then being asked to make very difficult decisions. They need a team of allied health professionals to help them navigate.

My question is: Why are the navigation services of community health teams only available in HRM, Windsor, and West Hants?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: The member's right. The worst-case scenario when families get information on diagnoses - there are supports in place for those folks.

We have also invested heavily in hiring more mental health clinicians across our province. In this budget, that we hope all Parties will vote for, there are additional investments in place to enhance the access points for people who are looking for assistance.

The single session supports I think would be one of them that would apply to situations like this.

LARRY HARRISON: Mr. Speaker, in addition to the overwhelming situation all patients can find themselves in, rural patients may have to add distance from and travel to specialists to their anxiety-inducing issues. People served by the Eastern Shore-Musquodoboit Valley Community Health Board do not have access to the navigation services of the community health team, and they really need these services.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the minister is: When will the minister extend the community health team model for chronic disease management to rural areas of Nova Scotia?

ZACH CHURCHILL: There is more money in this budget for more full-time positions in Public Health, including supports for infectious diseases. I will get staff to follow up with the member to provide information on the supports that his constituents can access at this time.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton-Richmond.

TAAT - FLEUR-DE-LIS TRAIL: PRIORITIZATION - COMMIT

ALANA PAON: Mr. Speaker, in 1994, \$26 million was invested in paving the Fleur-de-lis Trail, replacing gravel with pavement as part of a plan to improve safety and generate socio-economic benefits. Since 1999, when the majority of the road project was completed, residents and visitors to that area have been pretty much forgotten by government - reports of frequent loss of landline services, poor or no cellphone and broadband coverage being an issue, and some of the worst-maintained roads in the province, putting residents' and visitors' safety at risk.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Transportation and Active Transit please acknowledge the road's current deplorable condition and commit to prioritizing it in the next five-year capital plan?

HON. LLOYD HINES: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for the question. The highest priority we have in the department is safety. We're very concerned about that at all times.

I'd like to bring to the member's attention that this government, in the last two construction seasons, has committed over \$1 billion to improving the roads in Nova Scotia, which is more money than we've ever seen in the history of the province.

ALANA PAON: Mr. Speaker, I heard no response, in fact, to my question. I would just like to remind the minister that I have spoken to him on several occasions about the road conditions. I've brought this up since I was elected in 2017.

Despite being listed in the *Doers and Dreamers Guide*, visitors are advised by tourism agents and locals to avoid the Fleur-de-lis Trail. The Fortress of Louisbourg had a record 138,000 visitors in 2017 and a survey completed in 2008 stated that 60 per cent of the park's visitors would travel the Fleur-de-lis Trail if it were completed as planned in 1995.

Poor roads, poor cell service, poor broadband coverage and a lack of socio-economic development plan along the Fleur-de-lis Trail - it has become stagnant, despite reports and studies indicating that coastal sightseeing and outdoor adventure are the two top motivators for visiting Cape Breton.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the Minister responsible for Tourism Nova Scotia is: Does the minister agree that we are far overdue to put an investment into a plan to look at an economic development plan, a tourism plan, for the Fleur-de-lis Trail.

HON. LABI KOUSOULIS: Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to say that this budget has investments for trails for economic development across the province. Our tourism sector is an important one. Our trail is a draw for tourists to come to Nova Scotia, as are many other aspects in Cape Breton. We have the Cabot Trail, we have investments now going into a new ski hill, which I understand had a great season this year.

We'll continue to make investments not only in that region there but across the province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Truro-Bible Hill-Millbrook-Salmon River.

H&W - SRS.' PHARMACARE: MEDAVIE BLUE CROSS - COST

DAVE RITCEY: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Last week a constituent contacted my office about the Seniors' Pharmacare program. He had just enrolled and he had just turned 65.

The Nova Scotia Seniors' Pharmacare Program does not cover prescriptions that his former program covered without a physician applying for exemption, but first he needs to find a physician.

The program cost is \$424 to enroll. You must enroll at 65 or you are penalized. He will pay 30 per cent of all his prescription costs until he maximizes his co-pay with an additional expenditure of \$382.

Mr. Speaker, my question for the Minister of Health and Wellness is: How much is the government paying Medavie Blue Cross to administer the Seniors' Pharmacare Program?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Listen, we're always happy in the Department of Health and Wellness - and the majority of departments operate this way - if there are particular cases that members want to advocate for on behalf of their constituents, we just need a consent form signed by the constituent. But please send those in to our department. We've got a team here that is willing to assist. We'll look at every case that comes in and do our very best to help.

DAVE RITCEY: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the minister for his answers. That leads me into my next question - and thank you for providing me with that information.

This same constituent, again new to the Seniors' Pharmacare Program, had questions about coverage. He made three attempts to make calls to the administrators and waited up to three hours. He was never successful in getting through and is very frustrated. Obviously, this is a communication issue.

He also sent two emails that he received a "read" receipt for and again had no reply. This is simply unacceptable. Communication is critical and important when a deadline for cancelling is March 31, 2021.

My question for the Minister of Health and Wellness is: Nova Scotians have expectations when paying for services. When can my constituent expect a call back from Seniors' Pharmacare, as the deadline is fast approaching, March 31st?

ZACH CHURCHILL: I will inform the member that there is an increase in the Seniors' Pharmacare utilization in this budget, close to \$8 million. Again, if the member does get a consent form signed by his constituent, we are happy to look at that individual case and provide as much support as we are able to.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton-Richmond.

PREM.: PARTY WHIP - ELIMINATE

ALANA PAON: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Jane Philpott stated a fundamental flaw of Canadian democracy is the fact that party discipline obliges MPs not to the people of Canada but to the party's top brass.

House Inspection: A Retrospective of the 42nd Parliament found that "too much control and interference from . . . leadership and their staff" was the fourth-biggest obstacle to the work of a parliamentarian.

All elected officials should feel safe to perform their elected duties and to speak freely to the concerns of their constituents, free of fear and manipulation of Party Whips or any kind of leadership.

[11:00 a.m.]

I would like to ask our honourable Premier: Is the Premier committed to transforming an antiquated role with a tradition of coercion and threatening behaviour, beginning with eliminating the taxpayer-funded financial compensation of the Party Whip?

THE PREMIER: I'll just speak on behalf of the government. In our caucus, we've always had opportunities to bring forward issues and vote as we please in this House, before and during my tenure.

I continue to have full confidence in my team and the work they do. The role of the Whip at times is very challenging - to make sure that we keep decorum in the House. I want to thank the member for Clayton Park West for the work she continues to do, and previous members as well, especially during the time of the virtual sitting, which is new for the province. I want to thank the entire team for bringing issues forward when they have them.

ALANA PAON: Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable Premier for his answer. I would ask, as the Premier is newly elected and there is obviously an opportunity to do things differently moving forward, I would like to ask the honourable Premier: With the current state of partisanship and those who are in partisanship who have the majority in this House - of course we have two members who are Independents - if he feels that the rules and procedures and the privileges in this House are the same for all . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The time allotted for Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers has expired.

We will now move on to our mandated 15-minute COVID-19 break. The House will resume proceedings at 11:20 a.m.

[11:05 a.m. The House recessed.]

[11:23 a.m. The House reconvened.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, would you please call the order of business, Government Motions.

GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Resolution No. 229.

Res. No. 229, Estimates: CWH on Supply - Referred - Notice given March 23/21 (Hon. Labi Kousoulis)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

MURRAY RYAN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to continue my reply to the government's 2021 budget presented yesterday.

It was only 55 short weeks ago that I addressed you and my fellow MLAs in reply to last year's budget. I spoke at length regarding the foreboding clouds of COVID-19 facing our province; I spoke about how our tourism sector, our hotels, cruise ship seasons were in peril; how the Cat was due to set sail to and from its newly repainted terminal in Bar Harbour, Maine. That terminal will probably have to be repainted come next year.

Over this past year, it was encouraging to see our public servants, especially those in Public Health, led by Dr. Strang, guide us through. Dr. Strang - a name that is a household one now, but one that no one knew a short 13 months ago. In deference to Dr. Strang, I think many Nova Scotians would have preferred never having gotten to know the good doctor.

Here we are in March of 2021 and Nova Scotians can see the light at the end of the tunnel. Slowly, we are emerging from the pandemic with vaccinations rolling out, albeit slowly, but nonetheless rolling out. A life after COVID-19 does not seem that far away. A life that will be very different from before, but one that will offer the potential of some level of normalcy returning to our daily lives.

Here we are to discuss the government's plans, both capital and operational, for the next 12 months. On Tuesday, the capital budget was unveiled - a \$130 million increase from last year, to \$1.175 billion. Mr. Speaker, the capital budget is merely a continuation of projects started last year, with a few additional projects moved into the current year.

What about now? If this capital budget is, as proposed, in part an effort to stimulate the economy, and if some projects have indeed been pulled forward from future periods, why must we wait five more years for new long-term care beds?

In January, the government said the delay is the result of needing to do proper planning, to make sure that the right needs are met. To me, this means they want to add beds but have no model and no plan or the like done already.

I ask, how can the Department of Health and Wellness not have some plans, some design work, some planning for adding new long-term care beds when they've known for far too long about these chronic shortages? How is it that in a province with a provincial budget in excess of \$11 billion there is no one, not even in a basement office next to the furnace, who works in such long-term planning? Long-term as in "contingency," as in "break in case of emergency"?

I put forth that if the government is serious not only about long-term care but on wanting to accelerate some projects for the sake of the economy, there are two projects that after three years of planning should indeed be ready to go: the 65 long-term care bed facilities announced in 2018 for New Waterford and the Northside as part of their respective health care redevelopment projects.

Especially on the Northside, the location is a greenspace. There is nothing there. There are no logistical impediments to breaking ground tomorrow. In fact, in the Fall the government announced that the laundry facility, which is part of this redevelopment, would break ground this Spring. One would assume that the department would have the plans for the entire Northside health care facility at this point, not just the laundry. Why not start those long-term care beds now?

Yesterday, the government unveiled the 2021 operating budget, a budget ripe with new spending in many areas: improvements to mental health, record spending in long-term care, a focus on the environment. A new path, they say. But there was very little mention of health care. In fact, in the Speech from the Throne earlier this session, health care seemed almost like an afterthought. People are concerned about our environment. People are concerned about many things. But people are most concerned about having a family doctor, about ER wait times, and the long wait times for tests and procedures - some in excess of a year.

People are concerned about two-year wait times for their loved ones to get into a long-term care bed, about having to wait over a year for mental health appointments. I put forward that the system is indeed broken. The system is stretched to the breaking point. Those in health care are only human and can only work so fast and do so much.

I thank God for the professionalism, care, and compassion of our front-line health care workers who continue to work in this environment, one that at times leaves them powerless to help those in their care in a timely and safe fashion.

As an accountant, my experience to date has been in local, regional, and national organizations. Big or small, the trait that they all shared in common was thinking outside the box, the ability to innovate, and never resting, always moving forward.

Our health system suffers from intransigence, silo-ness, one-track thinking, and an inability to pivot, to move in new directions, or to innovate. My Lord, it took a pandemic for this government and the Department of Health and Wellness to agree to virtual doctor care, virtual doctor appointments, something which our Leader, the member for Pictou East, was openly mocked about during last Winter's sitting of the Legislature.

Yesterday, the government unveiled its much-anticipated and -promoted plan for enhancing mental health in our province. The government announced \$8 million in additional funding for mental health, along with the creation of an Office of Mental Health and Addictions to operate within and under the Nova Scotia Health Authority. While \$8 million is not a trivial amount by any means, when you're talking about mental health, a service that Nova Scotians last year spent \$220 million on, \$8 million is only a 4 per cent increase. Where will these funds be spent? To plan, to establish a separate office with a staff of 15, establishing single-session therapy sessions, new programs.

[11:30 a.m.]

Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, it's about the people. More programs, more services are not the issue - access is the issue, full stop. This issue is access and it's a lack of resources. Our universal mental health plan offers many solutions, some long term, but engaging the private sector mental health professionals by enabling them to build a public system would provide immediate increases to access and resources for the people, for those in need.

I will give the government credit. They do plan to start using virtual care as part of their solution to mental health. Wow, virtual health. First doctors, now mental health. If the utility is there, if the usefulness is there. Too bad the government wouldn't have appreciated it sooner. We might have been able to have a Fall sitting of this great Legislature, where we do the people's business.

Mr. Speaker, we've all gone through a very difficult time this past year. The country, the provinces - everyone agrees it will take several years for our economies to rebound from this COVID-19 recession. But, like the phoenix reborn and rising from its ashes, this could be our moment. The moment for our province to take this challenge and rise to it, to embrace the moment, innovate, reinvent itself and how it does things.

Thinking and moving outside of the box is not easy, nor is it simple. It requires stepping back and embracing the opportunity to not only do better, but to think better, to deliver better.

Over the past months, the Progressive Conservative Official Opposition may have been unable to sit in this building, may have been unable to hold the government to account in the Legislative sessions. We made the choice, the choice to support and follow the directives of Public Health, to work with government to protect Nova Scotians, but we were not silent, Mr. Speaker. Where we saw issues, we worked to bring these matters to the government's attention. Where we could help locally or provincially, we did.

But we were also busy, Mr. Speaker, busy drafting detailed policy papers. To date, we have released three such papers, each with detailed costings and deliverables and our hopes for this province. The creation of a department solely focused on mental health with a minister of mental health, a department whose 2021 budget within Health and Wellness would, if it was pulled out on its own, exceed the annual budget of seven other existing departments.

We also presented a detailed plan for long-term care and a commitment to create 2,400 long-term care beds. This is an issue that has been kicked down the street and down the road for so long it's amazing that the system did not completely break during the pandemic. COVID-19 certainly shone a light for all to see the weakened state our long-term care system was in. It is a testament to all who work within long-term care, those who, when the bell rang, provided the residents with care and attention, often becoming surrogate sons and daughters to our elderly who were trapped in these facilities, unable to visit or be visited.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, when the government answered the bell, they promised to create 236 new long-term care beds, roughly 10 per cent of the current need. Except these beds won't be available for five years. There are currently 1,500 people waiting. I wonder their reaction to hearing that in five years' time, we'll have 236 new beds for you.

Mr. Speaker, long-term care is a bill that has come due and must be paid. With our aging demographics, if we don't do it now, how can one expect to provide our elderly with the dignity and care they so rightfully deserve over the coming years? As the silver tsunami begins, this level in needs will only increase. Current projections state that in 20 years' time, we will need 20,000 long-term care beds.

Mr. Speaker, planning is based on "historical averages." There's no historical average that encompasses our baby boomer generation and the impact and utilization pressures they're going to place on our overburdened, under-resourced health system.

On a cold day in February, I was pleased to stand beside some of my colleagues and our Leader adjacent to the Cape Breton Regional Hospital for the unveiling of our health care plan. Titled *Hope for Health*, our detailed plan was developed with input from many in the sector, a plan that would result in a seismic shift in our health services, one that aims to reduce ER wait times, lower doctor shortages, reduce wait times for important

surgeries and tests, to open up virtual doctors' appointments not just for family doctors but for specialists as well.

Mr. Speaker, this plan is not an easy solution. It will be a lot of hard work and heavy lifting. It will require sitting down with the existing professionals, the doctors, the nurses, the specialists and the like, and working with and listening to them to find a way, a path forward, to achieve these lofty goals.

At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, doctors want to doctor, nurses want to nurse and surgeons want to surgeon, working with the goal of helping those whom the system is supposed to serve - the people. After all, that is the end goal, is it not?

Mr. Speaker, I remember back in the Summer of 2018 when this government came to Sydney for a health care announcement, an announcement made without any supporting information other than that they would be closing two hospitals, in favour of new health centres and expansion of the two remaining hospitals. I can remember the government at the time with their slogan, "If we build it, they will come."

My colleague for Kings North got it right yesterday when he spoke of the great collaborative health clinics built in his constituency over the last few years, built under the sound bite, "If we build it, they will come." Well, apparently, they didn't come to Kings North, to Kentville, to the surrounding areas. What are we to think in the CBRM with the sound bite, "They are building it and they will come"?

Mr. Speaker, health professionals are interested in quality of life, a competitive salary, good working conditions, and being respected. I fear our system doesn't just disrespect the people but disrespects our professionals, disrespects them by not listening to them, not valuing their input, their thoughts, their ideas, what is right, what is wrong, what needs to change, and perhaps - just perhaps - how things could be better as a result of this change.

Instead we have a government loaded with red tape, centralized decision-making, that is out of touch or uninterested in the local challenges or issues in the various community health networks. Mr. Speaker, health care suffered greatly as a result of the consolidation of the local health authorities.

Mr. Speaker, my community of Northside-Westmount shares many things in common with most constituencies in our province: concerns of access to COVID-19 vaccines, education, doctors, health care, wait times. We have an older demographic, many of whom are not computer-literate and struggle to get appointments for vaccinations. Unlike my colleague in Victoria-The Lakes, at least my vaccination site is only 30 minutes away, not three hours.

My office has and continues to help seniors make their appointments, for which they are most grateful, and we are only too happy to assist. But while my area's businesses and citizens have struggled over the past year, we have all worked to persevere, knowing the end was coming.

Mr. Speaker, five years ago the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development committed to building a new middle school for the Northside. This would replace the former Thompson Middle School in North Sydney and the Sydney Mines Middle School in Sydney Mines.

In June 2016, Thompson closed its doors for the last time and the students began being bussed to Sydney Mines. Based on the current plans, the new school is expected to open for the 2025-26 school year. That's nine years after the initial announcement, nine years after Thompson was closed, nine years of students being bussed.

Mr. Speaker, even for this government this seems a bit drawn out, especially given that five years later, with four to go on their timeline, there has been no community consultation, there has been no design selected and there has been no site selected.

Mr. Speaker, the shortage of family doctors is a problem across this province, in many communities, a situation that leaves the people not only without a doctor but unable to get the necessary prescriptions refilled, get the necessary required tests that they must have.

Last Summer, and I spoke of this yesterday, a private care clinic was established in Northside General staffed by three doctors rotating over three days a week. This program was delivering a much-needed service to those who lacked a family doctor. This past January, the Nova Scotia Health Authority chose to reduce this clinic to two doctors, or two days a week, extending these wait times for appointments.

Given our current shortage of doctors, 60,000 without doctors, why would the Nova Scotia Health Authority reduce a service that was making, and is making, a difference, and without question is reducing wait times and pressures on the emergency rooms. For the minister to say that they are actively recruiting, they are looking for new doctors and they are trying to bring new doctors in - this was an instance where there were doctors doing this and they just decided to remove one from the mix.

The minister speaks to doctor wait times being, in part, the result of people moving to our province. My question back is: How do we expect to be able to welcome and entice more people if we cannot guarantee them the most basic need - a family doctor? This is not the age of mail and telegraph. In our modern world of social media and the like, our best-kept secrets of beaches, welcoming people, views, and quality of life might be supplanted by "you can't get a family doctor."

This is a reply to budget. In fairness, how can one reply without speaking to the numbers? I would like to touch on a few. In reviewing this year's budget and comparing it to last year's, I looked at their respective four-year plans. You might be expecting me to talk about the deficit for last year and going to a surplus in four years, but I am not interested in that.

What I did find interesting, Mr. Speaker, is a narrative that in comparing the period of 20-21 through 20-24, last year's budget versus this year's, revenues will only be down \$80 million over those four years. Expenses, however, are going to be increasing - and increasing substantially. There is an additional \$1.2 billion in spending.

This government is definitely moving away from its previous fiscal prudence of balanced budgets, first and foremost. It would certainly seem that there is change in the winds and the only explanation is that there is an election brewing.

To this end, the government has not been shy to shine a bright light on its spending of over \$1 billion on long-term health, but that does not include any additional beds. I postulate, Mr. Speaker, that this increased spending in long-term care only serves to bring long-term care funding up to the bare minimum of where it needs to be, where it should have been these past years if it had not been ignored, and even if the cost cuts over the past seven years had not been made.

At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, it is not about more, most, largest, or new, it is about the people.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are in Mi'kma'ki, the beautiful ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaw people.

I'd also like to begin by thanking the Public Service, staff, workers on the front line who have toiled diligently for the year that we have been absent from this Chamber without a budget and without an opportunity to ask them questions or give them praise - as the case may be. We are truly appreciative and in your debt.

Before I offer a reply to the budget presented yesterday, I want to take a moment to remind us, to remind myself, of the context for this conversation.

Just over a year ago, we were here doing this very thing - debating a budget. This province has lived a full lifetime since then: COVID-19 and the loss of 66 Nova Scotian lives, including 53 residents at Northwood long-term care facility in Halifax; the murder of 22 Nova Scotians by a lone gunman in a beautiful, quiet pocket of our province; the loss of a small child on the banks of a river; servicemen and women lost far from home - six

lives cut short off the southwest coast of Nova Scotia when a fishing vessel sank. Mr. Speaker, these are only the public stories. It has almost been too much for us to bear.

[11:45 a.m.]

This past year has forced us to reckon with unspeakable tragedy and heartbreak. It has also in many ways brought out the very best in us. We have cared for our neighbours, our parents, our children, our neighbours' children. We have advocated for justice, we have stood up, we have taken a knee, we have witnessed each other's tears and frustrations, even if sometimes over Zoom. We've also celebrated weddings, graduations, new jobs, new babies, new beginnings. It's been a lifetime of a year.

For the most part, we've done well as a province. So far, we have been spared the worst of COVID-19 but, please, no one write about that for the *New York Times*. That never goes well for us. We've done so well because we are so good at caring for each other. Nova Scotia exists atop a thick, informal network of support.

Mr. Speaker, kindness is our superpower. We falter in many ways, but the heart of our province beats collectively. So while I will outline first the things we appreciate and in some cases - if not many - might even share credit for in this budget, I also want to say we are disappointed that this kindness doesn't get the strong structural support system it needs.

The caring economy is the economy of the future. The jobs are clean, the return on investment is high, the workers are the ones who most need support, employment and training. The work is real, tangible, and important and it's right in our sweet spot - caring for each other.

There is a nod towards this need. A \$100-a-month increase in Employment Support and Income Assistance is significant. It is needed. Importantly, it shows that this government can decide to help alleviate poverty just as quickly as it can decide to give a multi-million-dollar tax cut. It doesn't take three years and a transformation project to intervene directly in the lives of people in ways that will make them better.

The road map for transforming the Nova Scotia Services for Persons with Disabilities Program, which was accepted by this government in 2013, is finally getting paid attention to in this budget. We are pleased to see action on this file, however late it has come.

We see in this budget an acknowledgement that we are in a housing crisis and the beginnings of a commitment to deal with it. That acknowledgement was not present a year ago - an acknowledgement that there is a need for immediate mental health care for people in crisis; commitment to finally addressing the historic wrongs that have resulted in thousands of African Nova Scotians without clear title to their land, land their families have been living on for hundreds of years in some cases; and a commitment to addressing the

climate crisis that has been, is and will continue to be the defining existential challenge of our lifetimes, our children's lifetimes, our grandchildren's lifetimes, and beyond.

Each of these gestures points to a deeper issue that needs a more significant response - a just recovery. Building back better requires centring the caring economy, which includes child care, education, health care, and elder care, not just letting it exist alongside hundreds of millions in roads and infrastructure spending.

Again, these are the jobs of the future. In a recent article in the *Globe and Mail*, economist Armine Yalnizyan, who really coined this term in the current usage - and I can table that article - points out that in a normal recession governments are quick to do just what our government did following the original shutdown, which is to spend on shovel-ready infrastructure like roads and bridges. We did that, and we are doing that, in this budget.

This recession is different. This economist refers to this recession as the first "she-session." In a normal - "normal" - recession, we would see that employment loss centred in those male-dominated industries that I just mentioned, but not this one. This recession is different. To address the erosion of women's gains in the labour market, and the disproportionate impact of this recession on not only women but on racialized people, poor people, and people living in very precarious circumstances - that spending, that recovery, that stimulus should be social infrastructure, because that is the infrastructure that has been hit the hardest.

Health care, child care, elder care, and education collectively make up 12 per cent of the GDP in Canada and 21 per cent of jobs before the recession hit. Those percentages will climb as we recover and as our population ages, and all of those sectors will grow out of necessity, whether or not we want them to, and as we see automation in other parts of the job market.

The Premier has said publicly that he wants to measure the economy differently. This was reiterated in the budget speech, and yet the omission of any additional investment in child care causes us to question this commitment. Alternate economic measures, the Genuine Progress Indicator, the work being undertaken by Engage Nova Scotia and many others across the province, throughout the country, and around the world, function in part to reveal the true economic and social drivers in society that are missed with more conventional GDP measures.

Think back to that thick informal network I spoke of earlier, the basis of how we do things in this province. That's what gets measured. This budget shows an improvement in figuring out what counts, but the math still isn't right.

We entered the COVID-19 pandemic with more than 41,000 children in Nova Scotia living in poverty - the highest rate of child poverty in Atlantic Canada. Nothing in

this budget addresses that stark fact. The 2020 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Nova Scotia states that “children in families that depend on welfare are poor by design.” I’ll table that.

While we’re glad to see the increase in ESIA rates, families that rely on government support as their only source of income will continue to live dramatically below the poverty line. Single people and single parents with one child will continue to have the unfortunate status of having the lowest welfare incomes of any province in the country, notwithstanding the massive increase in rates. It’s not massive enough.

Between February 2020 and February 2021, 2,000 women in Nova Scotia left the labour market. Between February 2020 and February 2021, the number of women working part-time due to family responsibilities doubled. It seems we have found the source of the former Premier’s “organic child care.” It was women - women and families who made the difficult decision to leave or reduce their paid employment, often while seriously impacting their own mental health, to take on the unpaid labour of child care and home school and elder care and all of the other things that were required.

The government’s business plan acknowledges this. It states that “the pandemic has highlighted difficulties faced by women in the workforce, especially around issues of child care.” However, the budget allocates no new resources to address these difficulties.

Per dollar - I feel like this is the thing I’m going to say over and over again this session - per dollar, the child care sector creates more jobs than any other industry. It creates jobs. It is not a cost centre. It is an economic engine if we treat it that way.

The introduction of pre-Primary was welcome, but it destabilized an already precarious and essential sector. We were glad that government kept child care centres whole during the pandemic, kept them open, but more is needed. Expansion in the early learning and child care sector in Nova Scotia would provide more short-term economic stimulus than investing in almost any other major sector of the economy. It would help families. It would add to the GDP. It would increase consumer spending. Importantly, it would help vulnerable children. It would also create jobs. But this budget fails to make that investment. It is the single largest gap in the hundreds of pieces of paper we received yesterday.

We have seen that a beloved child care centre in Dartmouth, in Dartmouth South - the child care centre my own three children went to - announced this month that they would be closing their doors after over 25 years in operation. They attributed that directly to the crisis facing the early childhood sector. There is another daycare down the street in my constituency that is set to lose their lease this Summer. I fully expect, from talking to providers, that we will see more.

While we wait, Mr. Speaker, other provinces have made investments to make child care affordable while also supporting early childhood educators. British Columbia, three years into a plan to implement \$10-a-day child care over ten years, went ahead without the federal government. Alberta established a pilot project to provide child care spaces to families at \$25 a day. As of January 1st of this year, all child care spaces in Newfoundland and Labrador were \$25 a day. By January 2022, all child care spaces in Prince Edward Island will be \$25 a day. But here in Nova Scotia, parents pay an average of \$45 a day for child care. In fact, parents pay the majority of the cost of child care under the current funding model. Government funding makes up about 20 per cent and parents pay the rest.

Meanwhile, early childhood educators, despite a wage floor, continue to make less than a living wage for the most part, and are unlikely to have benefits and often retire in poverty - essential workers, frontline heroes.

The government would like us to believe that the solution to this problem is ongoing conversations with their federal counterparts about a national strategy for child care, the same national strategy we were promised in 1993, when I was in high school; in 2004, after I graduated from university; and again in 2011.

There is no acknowledgement in this budget of the additional costs incurred by families that had to find care for school-aged children so they could continue to work while schools were closed. We have a school closed in this province right now. Parents are scrambling to make alternative care arrangements, and for those who don't have access to the organic child care that we've been promised, those arrangements are not free.

Our caucus put forward a proposal of an immediate one-time payment of \$200 per child, equal to about the cost of a week of child care. We were pleased to provide our costing for this proposal to the Premier's office at their request and we are disappointed to see this gap.

On housing, this budget fails to demonstrate the urgency felt by the many Nova Scotians who are precariously housed. Think about that - precariously housed. They don't know if they'll have a roof over their heads. This is the situation for hundreds and hundreds of people who live in our beautiful, sparsely populated province. I know the government loves to talk about how our population is climbing, but we've all seen the endless aerial photos of our province covered in a canopy. Yet people don't have a place to live. Lots of people don't have a place to live.

We have more than 5,000 people on the waiting list for public housing, and a plan that will create 150 new units in the future. We have 241 rent supplements this year, in a market - at least here in HRM - with less than one per cent vacancy, where the Premier has acknowledged that we have a supply problem, although maybe not quite acknowledged the supply in non-market and public housing problem. What good will these do? What is being

done about supply? Why are we not investing public money into public and non-market housing?

[12:00 noon]

We are in a housing bubble. We could be buying rental units, we could be converting them. We could be offering grants to co-ops and non-profit housing providers - real funding, Mr. Speaker - funding like the federal money that flowed to municipalities that was tied to tight timelines. Already these new units - not enough but at least a start - are being built, not in five years or 10 years. They are going to have residents, I think, within 12 months. That's the kind of action we need. That's the kind of urgency that's required.

Our shelters are full, there are people sleeping in sheds on public property throughout the Halifax Regional Municipality. There are people sleeping in cars across the province. There is no shortage of space and yet there is a housing problem. It was caused in part by a gradual but significant reduction in public and non-market housing over the past couple of decades, and in what increasingly looks like a bubble, we need massive reinvestment to avoid an even bleaker situation going forward.

On long-term care - we've spent the last three-and-a-half years talking about long-term care, Mr. Speaker. I can't, in good conscience, reiterate the need because I would be underestimating the intelligence of my colleagues, who have heard this case put to them time and time and time again. Again, our investments do not match the urgency of the need.

We are glad to see that the recommendations of the report commissioned after the Northwood tragedy were accepted but, quite simply, it is not enough. In the same way that I would submit that we are not properly caring for our children, we are disregarding our elders. Mr. Speaker, 230 new beds in the planning stages, as my colleague discussed earlier, are cold comfort to the hundreds of seniors in multi-occupancy rooms and alternate level of care beds in our hospitals, the 1,000-plus who are on the wait-lists for long-term care, and the thousands more sharing rooms and bathrooms across the province, in direct contravention to what we now incontrovertibly know to be good public health advice.

In terms of justice, Mr. Speaker, the Budget Address commits the province to consulting with the community on African Nova Scotian land claims in historic African Nova Scotian communities. They also commit to consulting with the community on an African Nova Scotian justice plan and on issues of systemic racism in policing. Quite honestly, I would submit that we don't need that consultation if it is going to look like all the other consultation we've heard about in the past several years. African Nova Scotian communities have developed the solutions and they have done that because they have had to, because you can consult 150 times and the result still seems to be nothing.

Action is needed. The African Nova Scotian justice institute and policing strategy are ready to go. The African Nova Scotian health strategy is ready to go. We need concrete changes that address systemic racism in institutions. We need to measure the impact and the way that that racism shows up. We have lots of bills that we have put forward in previous sessions and in this one that would do that, including just good data collection.

I once spoke with one of the public health leaders in this province who said to me just after I was elected, data is the great myth buster - I'm talking about public health - that you need to be making decisions based on the facts. We'll take more data and going back to all the consultations we've done in the past.

We need policies that address the over-policing and over-incarceration of Black Nova Scotians. We need policies that tackle inequality. We need data that reflects those inequalities. We need alternatives to policing, for addressing lack of social supports in communities that so often end up in criminalization and further harm. There are ways to address these issues and many of them are already on the table in Nova Scotia, thanks to long-standing efforts of Black organizations and advocates.

We know that COVID-19 has also presented many challenges in Nova Scotia with regard to access to justice. We need to see investments that will help address the backlog in the courts and update court processes and systems to enable more to happen digitally, Mr. Speaker. These investments are not obvious in the budget. Maybe they are there but I look forward to having an opportunity to discuss them with the minister.

On the environment, we appreciate the Premier's stated commitment to addressing climate change. It certainly resonated with Nova Scotians. With only about 10 years left to make serious reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, addressing climate change and protecting the environment is top of mind for many in our coastal provinces. For those for whom it isn't top of mind, it will be once there isn't a choice anymore. We have 10 years left, Mr. Speaker.

It is unfortunate that this government's record is so poor on transparency and public involvement in key areas such as implementation of the Lahey report, developing new environmental goals legislation, protecting land, and involving the public in decisions with environmental impact. Importantly, they have no plans to transform Nova Scotia's economy and create the thousands of new, sustainable jobs that are needed to meet this critical planetary moment. This is not an afterthought, Mr. Speaker, and I would submit it is not just a budget line. We need to fundamentally change the way we do things to address the threats that are coming toward us that we have no control over.

They can actually control a lot of the things that we have been discussing here today - they can control investments in health care. We can control whether or not people have doctors. We can control the speed of our infrastructure projects and housing. We can no longer control what is happening with our climate, and therefore we must be prepared. This

budget does not give us faith that we are prepared in the ways that we need to be. The investments in this budget do not represent the ambitious economic mobilization plan required to transition Nova Scotia to an equitable green economy.

I was disappointed - and I hope my colleague from Dartmouth North will speak more to this in the future - that there was no acknowledgement in the Budget Address or the government business plan of the unprecedented challenge this year has presented for our arts and culture sector. During the height of the pandemic in Nova Scotia, when many were working from home or having very limited contact with other people, we looked to movies, music, virtual dance parties, crafts, books, the COVID-19 kitchen party, to maintain some semblance of our pre-COVID-19 lives, and so often people offered their artistry for free in various venues.

Even as we have increased our consumption of arts and culture, the artists - the people who create the works that we have relied on to get us through - have been hit particularly hard by this pandemic. Nothing in this budget helps these artists or this sector, the sector that is largely responsible, Mr. Speaker, for the ephemeral magic of this province, the thing that brings us closer and that draws people from around the world - and allows the government to talk about the amazing tourist attraction that our province becomes. We are building a new art gallery - yes, but what will go in it? We have a Neptune Theatre, but who will perform there? Without support and value of our artistic community, I submit that we will be in bigger trouble than we think we will, going forward in this recovery.

Last, just a moment on the \$1 billion in appropriations that we got a little photocopied handout of yesterday after a year. We all agree that the unprecedented nature of this pandemic and the impact it has had on all of our lives required an urgent and robust response. We understand that it is within the government's power to make additional appropriations outside of the budget to address unforeseen expenses, but it is important to state that this government saw no need for transparency, accountability, or legislative debate on \$1 billion in additional appropriations that were made last year.

This government that has been so focused during my time in office in counting every penny, in standing up and patting itself on the back for balancing budgets, but \$1 billion goes out the door without so much as a conversation among the elected officials of this Chamber. Mr. Speaker, I do not use this word lightly, but it is shameful. It is shameful.

All other provinces across this country met during the pandemic - during this unprecedented crisis that we have been facing - to debate and discuss the extraordinary measures required in the face of the pandemic. They met as the legislative body that is empowered and that ought to be consulted, whether or not it's required by the letter of the law, on these kinds of expenditures.

They also met because each of the elected members in this Chamber represents thousands of constituents who have opinions about the future of our province. That's why

we have a democracy, so that we can be in this Chamber together and that we can bring forward the needs and wishes and desires and challenges of our constituents, and we were denied the opportunity to do that, Mr. Speaker. The Nova Scotia Liberal government stood alone in suspending our democracy for a full year, and I submit that is a black spot on their record.

We're told that Nova Scotia was thriving. Then the pandemic hit. What we have before us now is a path that will take us back to balance, back to normal. Just a few years, and we'll be back to normal. We in the NDP caucus have a different way of looking at it. Our GDP was doing well prior to COVID-19. Our credit rating was strong, but people were suffering. We had, and have, the highest child poverty rate in the country. We still do. Many were struggling to get by. They still are. So, things weren't great for everyone.

Now we have an opportunity. We have the opportunity to build back better, to begin the road to a just recovery. While there are certainly pieces of this budget that we have been pushing for and that we are glad to see - that we can celebrate - we are not where we need to be.

The heart of our province beats collectively. Our superpower is kindness. In the end, the most powerful thing we have to offer each other is love. We're looking for a budget that reflects our values as a province and the ways that we care for each other. This is a start, but in a place where we take pride in checking on our neighbours and taking care of our communities, too many are still left behind. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The Estimates are now referred to the Committee of the Whole on Supply unto Her Majesty.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I move that you do now leave the chair and the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House on Supply.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

The House will now recess for 15 minutes while it resolves itself into the Committee of the Whole on Supply.

[12:13 p.m. The House recessed.]

[5:27 p.m. CW on Supply rose and the House reconvened. Deputy Speaker Susan Leblanc resumed the Chair.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The Chair of the Committee of the Whole on Supply reports:

THE CLERK: That the Committee of the Whole on Supply has met and made some progress and begs leave to sit again.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Madam Speaker, this concludes government business for today. I move that the House do now rise to meet again on Tuesday, March 30, 2021, between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 11:59 p.m.

Following the daily routine and QP, business will include the Committee of the Whole and Subcommittee on Supply.

I would also note, Madam Speaker, that the Committee on Law Amendments will sit from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. on Monday, and again from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Wednesday.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to adjourn and to meet again on Tuesday, March 30th, between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 11:59 p.m.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

We are adjourned and we will meet again on Tuesday at 1:00 p.m.

[The House rose at 5:28 p.m.]